

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 6824: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017,  
And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue.

Submitted By: Britt Bisson, Employment Services Manager, The Kennedy Center Inc.

March 6, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Britt Bisson. I am the Employment Services for The Kennedy Center Inc. and my program serves individuals in the DMHAS Work Services Program in Bridgeport. We are among the 500+ member agencies of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits.)

I would like to share my concerns with H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue. In particular, I wanted to express my sincere concerns to the funding reductions in the DMHAS Budget. This funding reduction would threaten critical services to individuals and families in our service area.

The Kennedy Center provides vital services to the most vulnerable individuals in our society. My program works tirelessly with the clinical services at Greater Bridgeport Mental Health Center to not only enrich the lives of the people they serve but to help them contribute back into the community as tax paying citizens of the state. In the last year, our services assisted individuals to find and maintain jobs as computer programmers, administrative assistants, and automotive mechanics, just to name a few of the many positions we have helped secure for individuals in recovery.

The benefits of programs like mine have been thoroughly researched and well documented. We provide a service that saves the state money by reducing re-hospitalization rates (Drake, 1998; Mueser et al., 1997). As one researcher put it, "All of these efforts make employment the cardinal outcome measure of psychiatric rehabilitation." (Tsang et al., 2000).

In short, funding cuts to Non-Profit programs would hurt the individuals we serve now, provide fewer services for individuals in the future and increase medical costs for the state in both the immediate and long term.

The proposed cuts, coupled with four rounds of rescissions/budget modification dating back to late 2012, have put enormous pressure onto an already severely depleted system. The reality is that nonprofit providers have been pushed to our breaking point due to the lack of investment over the past two decades. Chronic underfunding has already forced many nonprofits to close, compete against one another for scarce resources, layoff employees, reduce benefit packages; altogether creating a win or lose system that weakens the entire nonprofit sector and threatens its sustainability.

As members of the Appropriations Committee work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for SFY16 and 17, I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure critical programs and services are available to the residents of Connecticut. I'd also like to respectfully remind you that investing in the nonprofit sector will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money; a "win-win" for policymakers working to strengthen the economy, the nonprofit workforce trying to make ends meet, and most importantly, the clients and their families who count-on efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality services in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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